

Reading Dermot Bolger's *The Holy Ground*: National Identity, Gender and Sexuality in Post-Colonial Ireland

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Abstract

The first part of this essay traces a genealogy of the colonialist and nationalist discourses in Ireland, with a view to demonstrating the derivative nature of the latter and its intimate, fundamental connection with a particular construction of gender and sexuality. The roots of the feminization of Ireland in colonialist discourse are examined, as are the reasons for the systematic negation of (particularly female) sexual desire in Irish nationalist discourse, i.e. that which became the ideological founding block of the Irish Free State after 1921. On the basis of the insights gained in the first part, the essay then goes on to read Dublin playwright Dermot Bolger's *The Holy Ground* (1990), a one-act monologue spoken by middle-aged, middle-class Monica, where the author, it is claimed, sets out to deconstruct the nationalist myth of female identity, i.e. of the submissive, suffering, asexual Irish woman.

Key words: Nationalism, Post-colonialism, Femininity, Familism, Demythologise.

I

«In relation to women ... post-colonial nationalism in Ireland continued to develop on the basis of discourses which themselves had derived from negating, rather than deconstructing, colonialist discourses». So claim David Cairns and Shaun Richards (1991: 131), possibly the two critics whose work in recent years has done most towards promoting an awareness of the extent to which the discourse of nationalism in (colonial and post-colonial) Ireland and the discourse of gender and sexuality are intimately and crucially bound up with one another.¹ By now, it has almost become a commonplace to point out, as Gerardine Meaney does in her pamphlet *Sex and Nation: Women in Irish Culture and Politics*, that «In post-colonial Southern Ireland a particular construction of sexual and familial roles became the very substance of what it

1. This paper concentrates on Southern Ireland, i.e. on what has been, since 1949, the Republic of Ireland, politically and culturally the descendant of the Irish Free State instituted in the 1921 Partition Treaty, through which Northern Ireland was also set up. Whenever the focus is on pre-1921 circumstances, the inclusive term 'Ireland' is used.

meant to be Irish» (1991: 6). Such a definition of Irishness was notoriously enshrined in de Valera's 1937 Constitution, whose Article 41 claims the family as the fundamental social unit, possessing rights antecedent and superior to all positive law; commits the state to ensuring that mothers, and indeed women at large, shall not work outside the home, since it is within the home they can best contribute to the common good; and forbids the enactment of laws permitting divorce. One need only bring to mind recent public controversies in the Republic as regards issues such as abortion, contraception or divorce to realize that, although increasingly under pressure, the traditional definition of national identity, inseparable from a particular discourse on gender and sexuality, is still far from being extinct.²

The first part of this essay addresses the question of what lies at the basis of the mutual dependence of the discourses of national identity, gender and sexuality in Southern Ireland, and the specific form that this dependence takes. I would contend that the starting point for an exploration of these issues is the insight by Cairns and Richards quoted above, namely, that Irish nationalist discourse is derivative in the sense meant by Partha Chatterjee in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (1986): it depends on setting itself up as different from, but not on deconstructing, colonialist discourse about the colonized people. Tracing a genealogy of the colonialist and nationalist discourses in Ireland may go some length towards substantiating this view.

'Mise Éire', meaning 'I am Ireland', was the standard reply given to questions concerning her identity by the passive, pure, beautiful maiden, the *spéirbhean*, who populated eighteenth-century nationalist *aísling* poetry (Cullingford 1990: 5-6; Kearney 1985: 77).³ The function of this idealized figure, frequently a vulnerable virgin ravished by the masculine English invader, was to remind her menfolk that they must fight so as to regain possession of their land. As Richard Kearney has incisively noted, this native tradition of allegorizing and idealizing «both the physical reality and the political identity of the [colonized] land as female» (Cullingford 1990: 6), of constructing a feminized myth of 'Mother Ireland', resulted in real, flesh-and-blood Irish women themselves entering the realm of myth, of «spiritual timelessness» as opposed to «material wordliness» (Kearney 1985: 63). Kear-

2. After a bitter public debate and a referendum, the Constitution was amended in 1983 to include a clause forbidding abortion (Campling 1986, 15; Beale 1986, 112-22; Riddick 1990). In 1985, after strong opposition, an Act was narrowly passed removing the need for a prescription for non-medical contraceptives for persons over 18 (Campling 1986, 16; Beale 1986, 105-12). The campaign for divorce began in the mid-1980s (Beale 1986, 77-84) and it was only very recently, on 24 November 1995, that a referendum said yes to divorce by a minimal difference of 50% vs. 48.9%. Edna Longley (1994: 187), among others, has pointed out that Northern Irish Unionism is as markedly patriarchal as Irish nationalism; what differs are the particular manifestations of their respective patriarchal nature.
3. She was variously named 'Kathleen Ni Houlihan', 'Roisin Dubh' ('Dark Rosaleen').

ney has further suggested this may be seen as a sublimating process inseparable from the phenomenon of English colonization:

The more dispossessed the people became in reality the more they sought to repossess a sense of identity in the realm of ideality. Since the women of colonized Ireland had become, in James Connolly's words, the 'slaves of slaves', they were, in a sociological sense at least, obvious candidates for compensatory elevation in the realm of myth and mystery ... Woman became as sexually intangible as the ideal of national independence became politically intangible. Both entered the unreality of myth ... The more colonially oppressed the Irish became in historical reality, the more spiritualized became the mythic ideal of the Motherland. (1985, 76-77)

In this connection, in his study on «Women in Irish Mythology» Proinsias MacCana reminds us that the trope of «the land and its sovereignty conceived in the form of a woman» (1980: 520) was actually part of the Gaelic tradition long before Ireland suffered the impact of English conquest and colonization. However, in the ancient Irish tradition, sexuality was central and frequently explicit (MacCana 1980: 521). The king's legitimacy depended on a ritual of initiation, the *banfheis rígi*, including the enactment of the physical union between the king and the goddess personifying Ireland, who was not represented as a passive virgin, but rather as an active, 'material', fully sexualized participant. Elizabeth B. Cullingford's explanation as to why this seductress was transformed into the virginal, mythic maiden of the *aíslíng* tradition both parallels and complements Kearney's: «As the colonization of Ireland progressed, the myth underwent significant changes. Since the country had no rightful king, the idea of miraculous renewal became increasingly improbable: a vain hope rather than a vigorous certainty» (1990: 5).

The construction of the myth of Mother Ireland and the concomitant idealization of Irish womanhood, resulting in the negation of female desire and the emphasis being placed on virginity and motherhood, has also been claimed to have been the outcome of colonization in a different though complementary sense, which places the Irish case in the wider context of the history of Western colonial expansion. Various authors (e.g. Cairns and Richards 1988b; Cullingford 1990) have referred to the insight provided by the Indian political philosopher Ashis Nandy in his study of the culture and psychology of the British colonization of India, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (1983). Nandy claims that the history of Western colonialism is a history of the *feminization* of the colonized peoples, who are constructed in colonialist discourse as passive, childish, incapable of self-government, passionate and unruly—in short, in need of a strong *masculine* hand, the colonizer's, that will guide them. The nationalist reaction to this strategy of disempowerment has often been, in Chatterjee's terms, derivative, since it has consisted in the colonized people's vindicating their claim to power and self-government by insisting on their masculinity, thus attempting to become, in Nandy's formulation, *hyper-masculine*. This has

ultimately resulted in women in colonial and post-colonial societies becoming socially marginalized, politically disempowered, and being required to conform to a model of 'hyper-femininity' (Cullingford 1990: 6). In the Irish context, this meant the requirement that women should conform to the idealized, asexualized, pure model of Mother Ireland.

The feminization of Ireland in English colonialist discourse has been traced back to the sixteenth century, in particular to the work of Edmund Spenser. Thus, Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass discuss the way in which Spenser feminizes the Irish in *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596) and the ultimately political purpose such a cultural strategy served: "... effeminating the conquered would be a way of reasserting the masculinity of the conqueror" (1992: 168), threatened, from Spenser's New English point of view, by the danger of miscegenation which he saw rampant among the Old English.⁴ It was crucial, from this perspective, to insist on the absolute otherness of the Irish, on the absolute difference between them and the English. Such a difference was couched in the disempowering gender terms that Nandy evokes.

However, it was in the second half of the nineteenth century that the intersection of the discourses of gender and colonialism on the one hand, and gender and nationalism on the other finally crystallized in Ireland, each serving its particular ideological purpose —either to imprison the Irish in a «debilitating stereotype», or to «confine Irish women in a straitjacket of purity and passivity» (Cullingford 1990: 1). However, the latter, as pointed out above, was strongly derivative in being the result of a negation, not a deconstruction of the former. As such it lay at the basis of the definition of Irish identity which sustained the nationalist struggle in Ireland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Ultimately, it became the major cultural and, indeed, political founding block of post-colonial southern Ireland.

Cairns and Richards (1988b, 44-49) have shown that the philologo-ethnological discourse of Ernest Renan had an enormous influence on Matthew Arnold, the man who has been described as «the foremost organic intellectual of the mid-Victorian bourgeoisie» (Cairns and Richards 1988b: 43). Renan constructed a notion of the Teutonic races as energetic and warrior-like, while the Celt was claimed to be, by virtue of his emotional, melancholy, other-worldly nature, the creator of civility and culture. Renan, himself a Celt, saw these as qualities which he summarized by invoking the discourse of gender and sexuality: «If it be permitted us to assign sex to nations as to individuals we should have to say without hesitance that the Celtic race ... is an

4. The phrase 'Old English' refers to English and Anglo-Norman colonists who had settled in Ireland before the 16th century, following the arrival in the mid-12th century of the first Anglo-Norman adventurers and invaders. Most of them stayed within the Catholic Church. In contrast, 'New English' refers to English colonists settling in Ireland in the 16th and early part of the 17th century, who were generally adherents of the Anglican Church of Ireland.

essentially feminine race» (quoted in Cairns and Richards 1988b: 46). On the other hand, in Matthew Arnold's discourse, that of a Teuton, the ultimately debilitating effect of such a definition becomes all too obvious.

Arnold's *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867) picks up the construction of the Celts as a feminine race, this time in order to argue that they are unfit for self-government and unable to ensure the material progress of their civilization (Cairns and Richards 1988a: 32; 1988b: 46-49). They must, in short, accept English, 'masculine' leadership.⁵ The enormous influence of Arnold's so-called 'Celticist' discourse on Irish nationalist intellectuals of the second half of the nineteenth century lies at the root of the above-mentioned derivative reaction of negation, not deconstruction; that is, of the hyper-masculinity Nandy speaks of as the figure of the vigorous, masculine Gael, as opposed to the ineffectual, feminized Celt of colonialist discourse, brandished by nationalists as the core of Irish identity (Cairns and Richards 1988b: 91).

The nationalist construction of the hyper-masculine Gael was reinforced by particular sociological developments within Ireland. Together, they led to the emergence of the specific intersection of the discourses of gender, sexuality and nationalism that became moulded into a fixed framework in the second half of the nineteenth century. Sociologically, this period saw the emergence of a native middle class which would play a key role in the development of the nationalist movement and, obviously, in the particular ideological shape Irish nationalism was to take. The Famine that devastated Ireland in the late 1840s and early 1850s caused a sharp drop in population—the combined effect of starvation, disease and emigration—which had an unevenly distributed social impact: it affected landless labourers and their families most severely, while tenant farmers were largely spared. Their prosperity gradually increased after the Famine, as they bent their energies towards consolidating and extending their landholdings and transmitting them intact from generation to generation (Cairns and Richards 1988b: 42). The practices developed by tenant farmers to achieve those aims were based on a strict regulation of sexuality and an absolute control over marriage. They were found to be still prevailing in County Clare in the 1930s by American anthropologists C.M. Arensberg and S.T. Kimball, who grouped them under the term *familism* (Arensberg and Kimball 1961).

Familism required, in the first place, the absolute submission of sons and daughters to the father's undisputed patriarchal authority. The father selected his heir among his sons—not necessarily the eldest one—and passed on his farm during his lifetime. For the system to operate smoothly—that is, for the

5. Arnold's 'Celticist' discourse must be seen as a reaction to the Fenian activism of the early and mid-1860s (Cairns and Richards 1988b: 43). The Fenian Brotherhood, a secret revolutionary society founded in Dublin in 1858, aimed to achieve independence for Ireland by the force of arms if necessary (Boyce 1991, 176-86).

landholding to be transmitted under favourable circumstances—it was essential to exercise a strict control over access to marriage. Thus, matchmaking became widespread and, crucially, chastity outside marriage became the norm, since unregulated sexual desire might interfere with the possibility of favourable marital alliances. By becoming the most numerous and influential class in Ireland in the later nineteenth century, the familist culture of the tenant farmers became the core of nationalist discourse and of the nationalist definition of Irish identity (Cairns and Richards 1988b: 43).

It is tempting to see in the case of Ireland a particular instance of the general process described by historian George Mosse in his pioneering study *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (1985). Mosse sets out to «trace the relationship between nationalism, the most powerful ideology of modern times ... and respectability, a term indicating 'decent and correct' manners and morals, as well as the proper attitude towards sexuality» (1985: 1). Focusing on Germany and England, he shows how sexuality «haunted» middle-class nationalism to be ultimately deflected by it from the physical onto an ideal plane (1985: 2). This resulted in the development of a middle-class, nationalist ideal of manliness based on identifying it with freedom from sexual passion, seen as a potential threat to the family and the state, the foundations of the legal and moral order. It also resulted in idealizing woman while, at the same time, «put[ting her] firmly into her place» (Mosse 1985: 90). On the one hand, woman became a national symbol, the custodian of tradition; on the other, motherhood was central to the image of women. As desexualized mothers, women became the repositories of private morality within the triumphant patriarchal nuclear family. In this way, «Nationalism ... and its alliance with bourgeois morality forged an engine difficult to stop» (Mosse 1985: 9).

The engine was certainly not stopped in Ireland, but rather it acquired further impetus through the crucial intervention of the Irish Catholic Church. In the late nineteenth century, a «counter-reformational» movement (Kearney 1985: 62) took place which sought to re-invigorate the Catholic Church in Ireland by reinforcing its doctrinal purity and the devotion of the laity. As part of this movement, confraternities and abstinence societies were formed which «championed the virtues of self-sacrifice and sexual purity» (Kearney 1985, 76; see also Cairns and Richards 1988b, 62–63). As regards women in particular, the Church increasingly came to identify Ireland «as a virginal Motherland which could best be served by safeguarding our native purity of 'faith and morals' against the evil influence of alien cultures» (Kearney 1985: 76). Middle-class familism and Catholicism worked in tandem in late nineteenth-century Ireland to produce the powerful alliance between nationalism and (sexual) respectability that Mosse examines.⁶

6. I tend to agree with Longley that in his pamphlet *Nationalism: Irony and Commitment*, published by Field Day, Terry Eagleton fails to recognise that «Catholic Nationalism has often been as great an oppressor of Irish people, Irish women, as British imperialism or Ulster Unionism» (1994: 187).

In the effervescent early years of the twentieth century leading up to the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1921, nationalist discourse, with its repression of (particularly female) sexual desire and its glorification of the chaste, suffering mother figure whose role is to produce sons who will fight and die for Ireland, finds its most paradigmatic expression in the writings of Padraic Pearse (Cairns and Richards 1988b: 108-12; Cullingford 1990: 13-16). According to Kearney,

They epitomised the overall *mythos* of the 1916 Rising which gained currency in the popular imagination — particularly after the signatories were executed. Posters appeared on the streets of Dublin showing the martyred Pearse reclining *pieta*-like on the bosom of a celestial woman brandishing a tricolour: a mixture of Mother Ireland, the Virgin Mother of Christ and the Angel of the Resurrection. (1985: 75).

Similarly, Elin Ap Hywel (1991) has examined the way in which femininity is constructed in the nationalist periodical *Sinn Féin* in the early years of this century. Besides noting that nationalists systematically 'sanitized' the female figures from the ancient Gaelic tradition,⁷ her conclusions stress the negation of female individuality and female sexuality in the idealized figure of the mother:

This static creature sitting by the fire, unwilling to venture out into the great world, fixed in her domestic sphere, is iconized by her connection with spirituality into a secular Irish Madonna ... She barely exists in her own right; she is simply a channel for the life-giving milk of an Irish Ireland ... Although she possesses, by implication, the attributes of fecundity, these are stressed at the expense and to the exclusion of any expression of individual sexuality. (1991: 25)

It is the same myth that animates W.B. Yeats's *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902), where a young man is persuaded by an old hag to abandon his bride-to-be and hence to renounce sexual desire, so as to become a martyr for the cause of Ireland. The young man's sacrifice immediately rejuvenates the old woman, turning her into the title's Cathleen Ni Houlihan, the conventional personification of Ireland derived from the *aisling* tradition.⁸

7. Thus carrying on the process noted above.

8. This is a unique play in Yeats's career and one that, not surprisingly, rapidly became a nationalist classic. Yeats's position vis-à-vis the nationalist trope of the desexualized Mother Ireland was generally much more ambivalent (Cullingford 1990, 7-18); he famously defended Synge against the riotous nationalist reception of *The Playboy of the Western World* in 1907 (see below); and after the institution of the Free State in 1921 became a public spokesman for divorce, against censorship and generally in defence of the drives and desires of the body (Cairns and Richards 1988b, 118-119; Longley 1994, 188-189).

However, the nationalist version of the intersection between national identity, gender and sexuality did not go uncontested. In this respect, much attention has been paid to the plays of J.M. Synge and the commotion they caused, in particular *The Shadow of the Glen* (1903) and *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) (Cairns and Richards 1987; Cairns and Richards 1988a; Cairns and Richards 1988b, 77-88; Tiff 1992). *The Shadow of the Glen* traces the revolt against sexual repression of Nora, forced to marry an older man through economic necessity, while the more complex *The Playboy of the Western World*, by focusing on Christy's 'parricide' and highlighting Pegeen's final lament at the frustration of her sexual desire, doubly challenges the familist basis of the nationalist movement. The well-known 'Playboy riots' which greeted the premiere of the play in Dublin eloquently witness to its power to disturb nationalist ideology. As Cairns and Richards have argued:

The provocative power of Synge's play[s] was that [they] were truly libertarian, demanding, in essence, that Irish audiences recognize the social and sexual implications of the 'feminised' discourse of colonialism; that the female as sexual [sic] submissive was a case of misrecognition as advantageous to the colonisers as it was to the bourgeoisie who constituted the nationalist bloc (1988a: 40).

The demand, that is, was for nationalist audiences to acknowledge the derivative and hence incarcerating nature of their discourse on gender and sexuality.

The establishment of the Irish Free State with dominion status in 1921 was the outcome of, and resulted in, a political but not a social revolution (Brown 1985: 13-14; Cairns and Richards 1988b: 114-18). The dominant cultural forces continued to be those of familism and Catholicism and, as mentioned at the start of this paper, a deeply conservative nationalist ideology which confined women to their role as mothers and homekeepers, while at the same time denying their sexuality and generally setting up a strict dissociation between body and spirit, became officially sanctioned in the 1937 Constitution, which has been described by historian Margaret Ward in her already classic study *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism* as «The final stage in the patriarchal domination of women» (1995: 237). The body was officially consecrated as what it had long been: in Cheryl Herr's potent formulation, «a missing link in Irish identity» (1990: 7). Not until the 1960s, following the change in political leadership from de Valera to Sean Lemass in 1959, did economic reforms set in motion a social transformation that gradually began to open up fissures in what had hitherto been the monolithically dominant discourse on national identity, gender and sexuality (Brown 1985: 241 and ff.; Cairns and Richards 1988b: 139-54).

II

Kearney, as pointed out above, has claimed that the construction of the feminized myth of Mother Ireland has resulted in flesh-and-blood Irish women themselves being confined to the realm of myth as desexualized, self-sacrificing, submissive mothers. He sets up a contrast between the «mythic attitude», characterized by its leaning towards unity, permanence, ancestry, tradition, essence; and «historical secularity», based on the values of temporality, plurality, change, individuality, freedom, experiment (1985: 62-63). Hence, *mythologising* involves interpreting the present in terms of a unifying past, while *demythologising* implies reading it in terms of a pluralising future (Kearney 1985: 69). No doubt, in his one-act monologue *The Holy Ground* (1990), spoken by middle-aged, middle-class Monica, Dublin playwright Dermot Bolger sets out to demythologise the nationalist version of female identity as constructed over the historical span surveyed in the preceding section.⁹ In this respect, Richards has described the play as «the dramatization of but one of the last, despairing sacrifices on [the] crumbling national altar» (1993: 1).

As Monica's narrative repeatedly points out, her life with Myles, her recently-deceased husband, «a bastion of religious and social intolerance» (Richards 1993: 1), has turned her into a void, an absence. As Meaney states, «women only exist as a function of their maternity in the dominant ideology of Southern Ireland» (1991: 3), and Monica ceases to exist as soon as it becomes clear that she will be unable to become a mother.¹⁰ From that moment on, Myles absolutely denies her flesh-and-blood existence by not even speaking to her —«That silence, both of us sitting there» (130)—;¹¹ no one knows her at her husband's funeral (130) and no one acknowledges her when Myles holds a meeting of the Men's Confraternity in their living-room —«What had you told them Myles? (Pause.) You'd told them nothing. Did I exist at all?» (135). Thus, it is first and foremost through a strategy of representation, of giving voice (Wills 1993: 47), of turning Monica into a presence and a speaking subject, that Bolger effects a deconstruction of the myth of the submissive, suffering, maternal Irish woman.

Further, Monica does not conform to the myth in that she is not represented as a desexualized madonna. Cairns and Richards have pointed out that after Christy's departure in *The Playboy of the Western World*, Pegeen's «keen-ing ... suggests that the denial of desire is indeed a death» (1988a: 37), and in Monica's monologue the link between Myles's denial of her desire and death

9. *The Holy Ground* forms part of the collection *A Dublin Quartet* (1992), which also includes another monologue, *In High Germany* (1990), and two full-length plays, *The Lament for Arthur Cleary* (1989) and *One Last White Horse* (1991). Bolger is also a poet, a novelist and a publisher, the founder of the Dublin-based company Raven Arts Press.

10. Myles's sterility is the cause, but he refuses to admit this (130).

11. References to *The Holy Ground* are only to the page of the edition of *A Dublin Quartet* mentioned at the end of this paper.

is also made powerfully, and painfully, clear. Monica begins by proclaiming her active but negated sexuality:

That was it. For months. Lifting my head, waiting, wondering was anything wrong with me? Was there anybody else or did he just not know how to break it off? Felt so nice at first, like I was a piece of porcelain. But I wasn't. I was a woman of twenty-three and I wanted a man (123).

Towards the end, she sums up the lethal effect of the ideology Myles embodies: «You [Myles] had killed every feeling inside me until I just lay there numb» (140). The crucial difference with Pegeen is that there is no lament in Monica's narrative for Myles's 'departure', precisely because, as she says at the start, «Only two places the men in this ballroom want you,' Deirdre used to say. 'On your back and on your knees.' Myles was simpler I suppose, just wanted me on my knees» (115-16). Longley (1994: 173) claims that if anything Irish women should be personified by the disease anorexia, starved as they have been of emotional and sexual sustenance by the nationalist discourse on gender and sexuality.¹² Monica has indeed led a death-in-life next to Myles, and it is in this sense that her story is representative. However, if as Longley points out (1994: 173), anorexia implies the pursuit of an unreal self-image, a death-wish, subversively, Monica's death-wish is not aimed at herself, but at Myles: «It was an accident the first time, rats in the shed. Myles had poison on a shelf in the kitchen. My elbow slipped. It covered his cabbage like a fine dust. I was about to throw it out when I stopped» (137).

But *The Holy Ground* also reveals the way in which Irish men themselves have been scarred by the dominant nationalist ideology. Crucially, Monica's monologue focuses on the link detected by Mosse and discussed earlier between sexuality and middle-class nationalism: the latter as a sublimation of the former. Myles's inability to show physical affection, even to merely kiss Monica before their marriage (123); his utter ignorance of the female body, to the extent of mistaking Monica's period for a miscarriage (127-28); even his refusal or inability to acknowledge his own sterility (130); all of these are shown in Monica's narrative to lie at the basis of his passionate commitment to the 'Holy Ground' of Ireland (124-25), to the middle-class, repressive nationalist discourse whose genealogy has been traced above. As he joins the Legion of Mary and the Men's Confraternity (134) and furiously campaigns against contraception and divorce (136-137)¹³, Bolger's prose registers an insight akin to Mosse's: «Oh, you [Myles] thrived on that anger ... No lover could have given you such pleasure ...» (135).

The later part of Monica's monologue records Myles's increasing isolation in a changing Southern Ireland —he is imaged as the dying Cuchulain,

12. Or, alternatively, by the equally patriarchal discourse of Unionism.

13. See footnote 2 above.

«tying himself to a rock» (140). It is after Monica comes across the defiant little girl in the supermarket wearing the badge that says 'Spuc Off'¹⁴ that she publicly announces that it is a long time since Myles has been dead, that is, the ideology he embodies is obsolete. And as she recounts the story of her life, Monica is clearing the house of any trace of Myles and his stand for traditional Ireland. However, by the end of the monologue, it still remains an open question whether Monica, and Southern Ireland at large, will indeed be able to «loosen the grip of Anorexia, of ideological *rigor mortis*» (Longley 1994: 193).¹⁵

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14. The Irish branch of the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC), an anti-abortion organisation, was founded in 1980 (Beale 1986, 105-22).

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